

Tiny Tales

by LJ9

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Summary: A collection of five-sentence fics from prompts on Tumblr.
Mostly Mericcup.

1. Chapter 1

****Disclaimer:**** I don't own the characters you recognize here; those belong to Cressida Cowell, Dreamworks, and Disney Pixar.

Thanks to everyone on Tumblr who requested these. Most of them are Mericcup, but one is probably the closest to what might really happen if Merida and Hiccup met, and one of them is Astrid and Merida being rad friends.

* * *

><p>MeridaHiccup: dragon, baby, teething

Even squalling, her skin all blotchy red and her chubby little arms reaching up, begging for some relief, she's the most beautiful thing he's ever made. He hands her the silver dragon, a Zippleback, its two necks arched to form a ring that she immediately starts to chew on, her fists clutching its body, and as the noise dies down Toothless creeps back in and resumes his place on the floor near her cradle. He sweeps his hand lightly through her hair, light brown and curly, though her granddad says it may not stay that way; she looks up at him with watery eyes, gumming all the while. His wife joins him and wraps an arm around his waist, resting her chin on his shoulder, and without looking he knows that her face is proud and tender and protective. Her lips tickle against the skin beneath his ear when she whispers, "It's almost enough to make you want another one," and she laughs quietly when he turns to kiss her and says, "I'm willing to try if you are."

* * *

><p>MeridaHiccup: terrible twos, swords, child safety locks

"D'you know what your son did today?" Merida demanded the moment Hiccup came in the door. Before he even had time to react she grabbed his wrist and dragged him through the house, into the room where his son, currently two years and four months old, waited, looking contrite; clearly his mother had already scolded him, so Hiccup wasn't entirely sure what she wanted him to do. Then he saw the sword, a family heirloom of hers, embedded in the floorboards—he must've found it in the chest in their bedroom and then somehow dropped it from the stairs for it to get stuck like that; it was a miracle that it hadn't hit his sister or their mother or Toothless, and Hiccup sputtered, still at a loss, but also feeling a little proud that his son had managed to get past the child-safety locks at so young an age.

Merida whirled the both of them around and marched him back to the door, opening the door with a grand flourish and ushering him out to the car; it was obviously time for yet another run to the hardware store. "How come we never had this problem with your daughter?" he asked from the driver's seat, and she rolled her eyes and slammed the door.

* * *

><p>Astrid and Merida: axe, freedom, boots<p>

The shoes her mother has packed for her are slippers, really, thin-soled and delicately embroidered; they force her to take careful steps and hold her skirt above the mud as her brothers escort her up to the great hall, but they're fine for dancing in, the chieftain's blushing son's hands warm at her waist. But the next morning her hostess takes one look at the shoes and shakes her head before going to the wardrobe and producing a pair of brown boots, warmly lined and wholly functional, and she sits on the floor to shuck her slippers and pull on the boots, sighing as her toes wiggle through the lambswool lining, feeling more herself in footwear she can move in.

She envies Astrid's freedom as they stride through the village: the warrior woman seems to answer to no one save the chieftain himself, and no one tries to stop her as she leads the visiting princess into the woods. Astrid's smile is bright and sharp, her aim as good with an axe as Merida's is with a bow, and they challenge each other to ever harder feats of precision before each trying the other's weapon and each admitting the other's expertise. By the time they return to the great hall for dinner she's resolved that an alliance has been made, with or without the men, and stronger for its basis in shared interests and mutual respect than merely in marriage...though if she's offered a dragon along with the young man, she doesn't think she can say no.

* * *

><p>MeridaHiccup: legends, Thor, history

They tell each other stories: ones they've made up, sometimes, or ones that concern things yet to be, but more often than not stories of things that have come before, the histories of their homes, the legends of their people. Between the Hooligans and the Highlanders they have heroes and monsters, deities and lovers enough to fill

every long winter night with a tale. He learns how her father came to the throne and how he lost his leg, how her mother became a bear and then a woman again; she hears how he met his best friend and changed his entire world; each of them admires the other's triumph and gives thanks for their survival. She talks about brownies and selkies and wisps and he tells her about elves and a whole menagerie of creatures that serve the gods, goats and wolves and ravens and cats. Merida praises Epona, goddess of horses, as Angus thunders through the forest and from Toothless' back Hiccup mutters prayers to Thor, sky god, lightning-wielder and master of storms, and between the two deities their bed is blessed.

* * *

><p>MeridaHiccup: naked, blushing, self-conscious

His shirt went first, after which he unhooked his metal leg, pulled off his breeches, and slipped into the water, Toothless watching vigilantly until he was certain Hiccup was safely in the pool. The cool of the water was a more than welcome relief from the heat of a blazing midsummer day, especially one when they'd been hard at work, already preparing for the winter to come; though today it was hard to believe that there'd ever be a winter again, not with a sun this hot overhead and the distinct lack of any kind of breeze. With his eyes closed Hiccup didn't notice the figure enter the little valley, nor did Toothless alert him to their visitor, and in fact by the time he opened his eyes to see Merida standing at the water's edge the dragon was slinking away discreetly. Blood suffused Hiccup's face immediately as his hands shot downward to cover himself, vaguely aware that the last time someone had seen him this completely bare had been when he was unconscious and covered in blood, soot, and ash, and at the same time intensely aware that whoever had seen him then had certainly not been the young woman who had recently occupied so many of his thoughts and daydreams. Her face was flushed pink as well, her eyes never straying from his; he wished he could say the same as she pulled both dress and shift over her head in one smooth, unhesitating movement, and stepped forward to join him.

* * *

><p>MeridaHiccup: scars, kisses, quiet

Toothless ends it before Hiccup even has an opportunity to react, and where there had been a threat there is now none, beyond an arrow he can't dodge lancing across his arm; the wound isn't deep but it's sure to leave a scar, one more for his already impressive collection, a reminder to be quicker and more careful in the future. She'd put up a good fight, this wild Highlander, he thinks, as Toothless makes short work of incinerating the body, the flames that wreath her flesh mimicking the color of her curls. The string of her bow snaps in the heat and he can't help but admire the way she moved, attacking out of nowhere, not even a snapping twig betraying her presence, though he can't find it in himself to mourn overmuchâ€"she'd been an enemy, after all, an ancient foe of his tribe, but more importantly a danger to the two of them. And now she is not, and Toothless licks blood away from the cut on his arm, the dragon's version of soothing the sting, like a mother's kiss. Out of respect they stay until she's reduced to ash, the only trace of her left a silver medallion that he fishes out of the heap with a stick; the burn of it in his hand, around his neck, feels simultaneously like wound and embrace.

* * *

><p>MeridaHiccup: tattoo, braids, warriors

She threads her fingers through his hair and he can't suppress the moan that tears from his throat at the feeling, leaning back into her touch. She comes from a long and proud line of fighters, and consequently will always be the stronger of the two of them, the braver, the better; in her hands he's weak and willing and utterly unashamed. The tugging on his scalp tells him she's plaiting againâ€"practice, she claims, for when they've a daughter whose hair she'll need to tame, and talk of their future together, of their issue to come, thrills him. When he can no longer bear it he twists beneath her hands, catches her round the waist, pulls her atop him as he falls back onto the bed. She grins, tender and not a little triumphant, and her lips brand her name across his skin.

* * *

><p>MeridaHiccup: no prompt, just a random surprise one

She drops her head onto the open textbook, curls splaying out to completely obscure equations about redshifts and blueshifts and the Doppler effect, and groans, "This is not why I took this class."

"Why did you, then?" he asks, knowing that most people are in it because it's one of the easier science credits, or because they hear "astronomy" and think "Star Wars" or "Star Trek" or "Doctor Who," or because they get to launch rockets at the end of the semester; only one of those could really apply in this case, and though Merida's already doodled designs for her rocket in her notes, he hopes there's more to one of his favorite classes for her than small explosions.

She stands swiftly and says, "I'll show you," leaving her bedroom without waiting for him to respond and he hurries after her, follows her into the attic, through a small window, and onto the sloped roof, where above the trees the stars glitter. They twinkle because of atmospheric disturbance, he knows, and some of them that look like stars are actually planets or satellites, and he realizes that while he's seeing long-past chemical reactions, storms and collisions and the inexorable pull of gravity, all beautiful in its own way, she's seeing something else equally beautiful: a dance, a story, a possibility for adventure.

He steals a glance at her face tilted up to the night sky, feels the tug of her luring him into orbit; but at the touch of her hand on his he thinks that just maybe they're a binary star, orbiting each other.

2. Chapter 2

****I**** realized yesterday that I had quite a few of these that'd been posted on Tumblr but never made their way here, so this was due for an update. Thanks to everyone who prompted me and got my creative juices flowing!

These are all more or less Mericcup.

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><p>Gown, torn, linen<p>

It was when Elinor saw her daughter sat quietly by the fire, a threaded needle in hand and a gown spread over her lap as Merida stitched up a minuscule tear in the linen, that she realized how much had changed.

The fact that Merida much preferred activities that made mending necessary to the actual mending itself came as no surprise to anyone who had known her for more than a few moments. All of her mother's sighing hadn't stopped the young princess from coming home in damaged dresses, rips in her hems and rends in her cuffs, snags and tears and missing laces, and merrily leaving them for others to repair, with little thought for either the seamstress' hard work or her own vanity.

That girl was gone now, and in her place was a young woman willing to take responsibility for her actions; when Elinor spoke up to praise her it was as much for her maturity as for the delicacy of her handiwork.

The balance of the changes became clear when Merida shrugged, the faintest of flushes on her cheeks as she explained her care with "It's his favorite."

* * *

><p>Dragon, horse, grass<p>

You'd best keep those ridiculous and frankly unsightly wings out of my way if you don't want them stomped on, you jumped-up snake. Mistress and I'll not lose this race, no matter how big a soft spot she has for your skinny excuse for a rider, who I must say has terrible posture.

Do I look like the kind of creature who slinks around in the grass on its stomach, you hairy herbivore? The only reason you even have a chance is because this is a footrace, and the only reason Hiccup agreed to that is because for some unfathomable reason he wants your princess to think well of him.

"Readyâ€¦|steadyâ€¦|go!"

* * *

><p>Cuddling<p>

He hadn't realized just how late it had gotten until her voice, thick with sleep, asked from the foot of the stairs, "Are you coming to bed tonight, love?"

Hiccup looked up from his planning to see the fire in the hearth down to its embers, the glow barely illuminating her where she stood rubbing her eyes, creases lining her face, hair in a loose braid over one shoulder and feet bare. Her wan, unfocused smile was interrupted by a yawn and without a moment's hesitation he rose from the table,

wiping charcoal-smudged hands on his breeches and taking the hand she offered, its every callus familiar to him.

As Merida snuggled back into the warmth of their bed he divested himself of clothes and prosthesis, stretched out next to her and turned on his side; she rolled toward him with eyes already shut, tucked her head beneath his chin and pressed a sleepy kiss into his neck, tangled her legs gently with his. He ran a hand from her wrist up to her shoulder, skating blunt fingernails over her arm and smiling as she shivered and burrowed closer, and then slid the tie from her braid to wind his fingers through her curls, to fall asleep with his arms full of her.

* * *

><p>She couldn't stop the hiss that escaped her lips with the smack of the wooden practice sword against her knuckles, though she tried her best to disguise it by demanding, "When did you get so good with the sword?"<p>

He shrugged with a self-deprecating smile, as if he could hardly believe it himself, and all at once the sting in her hand was overshadowed by a sudden fullness in her heart, a pleasurable, thrilling weight. Without her consent her sword hand dropped; when he noticed it, and the way she stood staring, eyes wide and lips parted, he crossed to her.

"I didn't think I hit you that hard," he teased, picking up the injured hand, and at his touch the sword clattered from her grasp and her breathing hitched at the callused fingertips on her palm, the heat of his nearness, the eyes she couldn't look away from. It was better than any spoken apology when he lifted her hand and pressed his lips to the hot redness across her knuckles, and though she knew the bruise would take days to go away, it would take the tingling far longer to fade.

* * *

><p>Watch the queen conquer<p>

Once he'd learned the rules, Hiccup took to chess like a dragon to flying, and no wonder: he loved the challenge of beating his opponent not through brawn but through skill and strategy, anticipating the other's decisions, exploiting weaknesses and errors. Merida found it hard to share his enthusiasm when she was constantly being beaten, but she still agreed to play from time to time, mostly when her mum, the only one in DunBroch who could properly test Hiccup's abilities, wasn't available.

Barely half a dozen turns in and she was losing already, though that didn't dim his focus in the slightest as he stared at the board, fingers steepled and eyes bright; at this point there was only one way to turn the tide in her favor, so she stood, apparently without his noticing, and moved behind his chair to drape herself against his back, her hair brushing his neck, her arms falling over his shoulders to run her hands up and down his chest, and though he shivered beneath her he held firm, merely murmuring, "You're cheating." Instead of convincing her to stop, as he undoubtedly hoped it would, his response only urged her on and she set her lips to work, kissing from the nape around the side of his neck, from under his ear to the

spot where his pulse was steadily increasing to just below his jaw, which flexed as he tried to stifle a moan.

He lasted as long as he could, his breath growing shallow and his skin covered in goosebumps, until a nip to his earlobe finally destroyed the last vestiges of his self-control and he pulled her into his lap, wrapping an arm around her waist and holding her close, and never happier to lose as when she brushed her lips against his and whispered, "Checkmate."

* * *

><p>From the moment he saw the flash of her eyes it felt like a blade was slipping between his ribs, into a place still raw and throbbing with loss, no matter how many seasons had passed; and the knife only twisted when she opened her mouth, teasing him from the first, though this new voice sounded nothing like the one that woke him from his sleep at night. He avoided her as much as possible, hoping that if he wasn't reminded of what was missing (her blue eyes, her easy grace, her deadly aim) the numbness would swallow him up again, would bathe the wounds that never seemed to heal. But duty and his father required him to face this young woman, and he found the pride, the calloused hands, the steel that ran through her so familiar that he ached, that the wrong name found its way almost to his lips, that he nearly smiled. With time he learned the differences between themâ€"that where the shieldmaiden had been angular the princess curved, that her temper flared and blazed brightly and then spent itself while the other had held grudges, that laughter loud and unrestrained was not worth less than laughter hard wonâ€"and he was surprised to discover that desire had not faded within him, that there was still something left that woke and stirred within his chest. And though the ache of memory would never completely leave him, in time he came to see morning as a promise again, and when he reached for her hand he found it warm and waiting.

* * *

><p>Genderswapped, dress fitting<p>

With pins jabbing into her skin every time she so much as shifted and an impatient seamstress armed with yet more pins, a wickedly sharp pair of scissors, and a measuring tape that could easily double as a garrote if the young lady would not stop fidgeting, Hicca wished she'd kept her mouth closed instead of idly musing aloud about what would be appropriate to wear to the feast, because Queen Elinor had given an all-too-knowing smile and said, with what in retrospect should have been worrying alacrity, "Don't fret about that, dear." Her plan had become clear as the seamstress slipped one of Elinor's old gowns over her head, momentarily muffling Hicca's protests that she would look unnatural in it, and that dragon trainers didn't wear dresses; in reply the queen had assured Hicca that she would look lovely and then raised an eyebrow, pointedly wondering if they ought to expect errant dragons showing up at the king's birthday celebration, which had effectively shut Hicca up and more or less resigned her to her fate.

Murdoch wasn't having to go through any of this, she thought, resisting the urge to cross her arms petulantly; he was out there doing something fun, like riding, or sparring with his dad, or shooting, because all he would have to do to get ready for the feast

would be to wash, pull on a shirt, and put on his kilt, and she wanted to rail against the injustice that she had to stand here while he got to do as he pleased. But then she stilled as images filled her mind—highly distracting ones, of the corded muscles of his arms and shoulders as he drew his bow, droplets of water sparkling among his brilliant curls and dripping down his neck, the pale freckles and silvery scars that her fingers itched to trace, the way his ginger stubble lent his normally playful grin a dangerous air, how his eyes sometimes went storm-grey as they caught hers—and when the memory of her name murmured in his low drawl sent a shiver through her, the seamstress made no comment.

The next evening, with the alterations finished and the pins removed, the dress was surprisingly comfortable, skirt swirling around her feet and bodice reassuringly snug but not too tight, and when she saw herself in the glass, with her hair free of its braid falling in waves over her shoulders and her cheeks lightly flushed with nerves and excitement, she nearly believed the queen's certainty that she looked lovely; but the slow smile that lit up Murdoch's face as he saw her, his hand warm on her hip as they danced, and his lips on hers when he pulled her into a dark hallway convinced her.

* * *

><p>Genderswapped, kilts [The old-style kilt was one long continuous piece of fabric, secured only with a belt.]<p>

"See something you like?" he asked, that damned smirk on his face and his tone equal parts flirtatious and amused.

She hadn't realized she'd been staring until she was caught; Hicca swallowed hard around a throat suddenly tight and willed her voice to stay steady and casual as she replied, with a nod to his outfit, "Just trying to figure out how it works."

He reached out and closed his hand around her wrist, pulling her closer and then guiding the hand to follow the path of the plaid: "It starts here," he said, touching her fingers to the free end hidden at his hip, hiding the skip of his breath when she took the upper edge of the material between thumb and forefinger and tracked it along his stomach, to the pleats round his back, to the end that passed over his shoulder, crossed his chest and tucked into his belt; then her hand paused where the fabric covered his heart, those nimble fingers tracing the pattern of the tartan and teeth worrying her lower lip.

Voice husky, he offered, "It's much easier to take off than it is to put on."

"I'll keep that in mind," she said, smiling crookedly, before her fingers closed around the wool and yanked him down to meet her lips.

* * *

><p>Modern, daughter's first heartbreak<p>

The dance wasn't supposed to be over for another hour, so when the front door slammed and footsteps hurried up the stairs Hiccup sat up quickly, tugging his shirt into its proper place and glancing upward,

while Merida raised herself on her elbows, a frown forming on her face; she gave him one last kiss before he got up, and then he made his way to their daughter's room to check on her, straightening his hair as he went.

Through the open door he could see her half-lying on her bed, clutching her old stuffed dragon and crying quietly, and when he knocked she didn't yell at him to go away, so he went in and sat on the edge of the bed, waiting for her to finish, trying to quell the sick feeling building in his stomach as scenarios that might have upset his normally easygoing daughter crowded his mind. In a few minutes she righted herself, sniffing and wiping her eyes, and when he said, mildly, "I take it the dance was eventful," the torrent poured forth: Danny Gustavson hadn't technically asked her, but all of her friends had sworn that he liked her and that he'd just been too shy to ask outright, and he had asked her to dance to a slow song, and dancing with him had been really, really nice, and then she'd had to go to the bathroom and when she came back Danny had been making outâ€"not just kissing, seriously making outâ€"with one of the girls from the volleyball team, and her friends had tried to convince her to stay but she couldn't stay, she had to come home. She looked up at Hiccup then, face tracked with tears and mascara smudged around her eyes, the hairstyle she and her mom had spent so long on now in disarray, the dress she'd been so eager to wear now wrinkled and wet, and her voice cracked and his heart broke when she said, "I don't know what's wrong with me, Daddy."

Losing his leg hadn't hurt as much as hearing his kind, talented, clever baby girl doubt herself did, and he wrapped his arms tightly around her as she cried, telling her that there was nothing wrong with her, that her worth was not to be measured according to the hormonal impulses of a 16-year-old boy, that she was and always would be loved more than she knew; and he held her until she fell asleep, knowing that his strong, resilient girl would heal eventually and wishing in vain that she'd never be hurt again.

3. Chapter 3

All of these are Mericcup, though some of the prompts were too involved for a short description.

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><p>Birth of their first child<p>

An especially loud groan reached them and Hiccup's head snapped up, shoulders impossibly tense as he stared toward the door like he was trying to see through it; Fergus stifled a weary chuckle and repeated, for what must have been the twelfth time that day, "She'll be fine, lad, they both will be."

It had been hours already, and though Fergus assured him that that was normal, that bairns just took time to make their way into the world, and that they should none of them be surprised that Merida's bairn would be a stubborn one, Hiccup wasn't sure how much more waiting he could takeâ€"he'd already paced the room until he could do it with his eyes shut, and no matter how many times he told himself that the midwife was there, and Elinor, who had survived doing this, with triplets, no less, and that Merida was the strongest woman he

knew, he felt himself going mad with worry about his wife and their baby. Worry and impatience: he hadn't expected to be able to stay with Merida, but being herded out of the room like he was nothing more than a Terror underfoot had rankled, and as much as he wanted to see Merida, to be reassured that she was okay and to make some stupid joke so she'd shake her head and smile, what he really wanted was to meet his son or daughter, to learn if she had her dad's nose or if he had his mom's hair, to see the little fingers and toes, to hold the child that he and Merida had made.

What seemed like days passed before the midwife came out and Hiccup stumbled toward the door, exhaustion and anxiety knotting his tongue until the woman smiled and ushered him in to where Merida lay propped up slightly, frighteningly pale and damp-haired; as he clattered forward she looked up and smiled, weaker than he'd ever seen her but just as proud as ever, and he pressed his lips to her forehead, offering grateful, silent prayers to Frigga for mother and child's safety. Then Merida turned her smile on the bundle in her arms and said, "Look, little love, your daddy's here," and Hiccup met his daughter through a haze of tears.

* * *

><p>Confetti<p>

Despite having four active children, a somewhat careless husband, and a busy life herself, Mrs. DunBroch did an admirable job of keeping their house neat and presentable; that was why it was such a surprise to walk in and see the living room covered in what looked like the aftermath of a ticker-tape parade, tiny bits of paper heaped on every conceivable surface.

"The boys wanted to make it snow," Merida explained in that tone that meant she had been very angry recently and might well be again soon, broom in hand and scraps clinging to her, "so they emptied the paper shredder in front of a fan."

"It worked," Hiccup said, surveying the damage and wishing he'd gotten there in time to see itâ€"not that he really wanted to witness her wrath, but he could just imagine how lovely she must have looked standing there with paper swirling in the air around her, allowing herself a moment to revel in her brothers' spontaneity and creativity. Then it occurred to him that even if he couldn't recreate the exact moment, he might be able to catch a glimpse of it, even at the risk of rekindling her ire, so he leaned down, scooped up two handfuls of junk-mail confetti, and tossed them in the air high over their heads; she gasped in dismay, eyes wide as the first pieces started to land in her hair, but before she could lay into him for making the mess even worse he took her face in his hands and kissed her gently, the paper a soft shower on his skin and Merida sighing and melting into him.

A chorus of disgust announced the triplets' return with the vacuum cleaner, and she looked at them with a raised eyebrow, declared, "Clean it up yourselves," and dragged a laughing Hiccup away to spend the better part of an hour picking confetti from each others' hair in between kisses.

* * *

><p>Ring(s)<p>

In the space between the buzz that marked the last ring on the other end of the line and the voicemail picking up he ended the call with a swift jab and then immediately redialed, muttering, "Come on, pick up, pick up," as Toothless' eyes tracked Hiccup's restless pacing, the soft whisper and click of his feet on the bare floor nearly lost below the repeated electronic trill of his call going unanswered. His already-racing pulse accelerated still further as he waited, the anger flaring, kept alive by her damned stubbornness, her refusal to listen, her unwillingness to apologize; then, without meaning or wanting to, he pictured her in her apartment with eyes red-rimmed, arms straitjacket tight across her chest, knees drawn up protectively as she glared at the endlessly ringing phone, and an acrid sludge of guilt dripped heavily into the pit of his stomach. He'd apologize for overreacting, for snapping at her, for calling her childish and selfishâ€"he'd even do it without mentioning that she'd goaded him, known exactly what to say that would set him off and done it anywayâ€"if she'd just answer the phone and let him talk; he could deal with that humility, and with her rage, but he never could deal with her tears.

Toothless' ears swiveled toward the door and he let out a low whine just before the hesitant knock sounded, and though he swore quietly at the interruption Hiccup opened the door anyway, revealing Merida with her hair thrown into a ponytail and one of his sweatshirts hanging long on her torso, one hand holding her phone to her ear. "I wanted to say I was sorry," she said, lowering her phone, "but the line was busy," and at her tentative smile he took her hand and pulled her in.

* * *

><p>Olympics AU<p>

As Hiccup makes his way back toward the room he's sharing with Gobber he can't help overhearing some truly inventive cursing going on from a nearby room, accompanied by a pathetically limp almost-twang, nor can he help peering through the open door to see an incandescently irate redhead wielding a compound bow in the general direction of a cowering bucktoothed blond; through her accent and the invective he works out that there's a problem with her bow, and she's curious about whether she should go ahead and get it fixed or if he'd like to break it some more first. Against his better judgmentâ€"she's an opponent, even if Berk doesn't have anyone competing in archeryâ€"he pokes his head in, finds himself offering his services, rears back when the redhead swings around with hot blue eyes and a sneer on her face and the understandable questions of why he'd want to help, why she should trust him, smiles lopsidedly and tells her, shrugging, that he must be feeling the Olympic spirit. She looks incredulous but surrenders the bow anyway and slumps on the bed, still tightly coiled despite her posture, as he works (the blond boy has escaped, relieving the tension in the room just a bit), so he makes bad jokes and even worse puns until at long last she laughs; for the next few days he wonders in the back of his mind how she did but he's too run off his feet to find out, until she shows up at his door with a gold medal around her neck, its color outmatched by her glowing hair, and a relaxed smile on her face, and thanks him with a kiss to his cheek.

* * *

><p>Harry Potter AU<p>

All of the houses had their own little extracurricular activities, mostly organized by and for the older students: Hufflepuff did a sort of Iron Chef thing, and she'd heard that some of the Slytherins ran a profitable betting business, but the open secret that was Gryffindor's snogging challenge had to be the best, since it combined the thrill of sneaking into places students weren't meant to be with the simple teenage thrill of kissing (though there were of course rules: all of the kisses had to be documented to count, and extra points were awarded for not getting caught, obviously, but also for every partner from another house, as it was deemed too easy to team up with another Gryffindor to complete the challenge); she'd already ticked off a few locationsâ€”the Shrieking Shack was child's play, as was the Forbidden Forest, what with the number of detentions she'd had to serve thereâ€”but then she ran into a rather difficult one and decided to consult someone cleverer than her.

Hiccup had shrugged and said sure, he could get into the Restricted Section, and while a Disillusionment Charm probably wouldn't work it wouldn't hurt to try an Invisibility Spell on her, as long as she could stay quiet; she could and proved it that evening as they wove through the stacks to find a corner where he could cast the spell on her, and then followed closely behind as he flashed his permission slip and a smile at Madam Pince and slipped into the stacks of restive books. "_Finite incantatem_," he whispered when they were safely inside, and the moment he could see her again, before she had time to ask if he was readyâ€”before she had time to ask herself if she was readyâ€”his hand found its way to her hair and his lips, wind-chapped and tasting faintly of pumpkin juice, to hers, like he was the one with the challenge to complete, not her; and it was some time later before she remembered that she'd forgotten the camera, and when she pulled away long enough to tell him they'd have to do it all over again he laughed like he didn't mind at all.

* * *

><p>Modern, texting ["I'd Build You a World" universe]<p>

The sound of her voice telling a coworker that she was taking her break caught his attention, and he watched as she headed toward the pub's back room, slipping her mobile from her pocket almost furtively as she went, keying in her password and swiping her thumb across the screen. Whatever she saw there made her pause, bringing the mobile closer to her face and slouching just inside the doorway (he tsked a little under his breath at her posture, which his mother would despairingly compare to a sack of potatoesâ€”though a more obstinate, opinionated sack of tatties he'd never seen). One corner of her mouth rose as she read, despite the teeth fastened on her lower lip in an attempt to control her grin, and then her thumbs danced across the screen with her reply and she gave a satisfied little nod as it sent; in the time it took him to swallow a mouthful of lager she must've got an answer, because when he looked back her eyebrows were raised and an unmistakable blush suffused her cheeks. Before she had the chance to answer the flick of her eyes over the screen meant that another message had arrived, and this one made her melt: he saw her surprise slide into contentment, saw her slump near boneless against the wall, saw one hand steal up to shield her smile from view, saw

her eyes soft and full as they lingered on some secret words. He wondered if she knew how in love she looked or, more to the point, if she knew how in love she already was (though he knew she'd almost certainly deny it if he asked); then, with a last glance at the happiness on his friend's face, Jamie raised his glass in a salute to the only man who could make Merida DunBroch glow.

* * *

><p>Chainmail<p>

It was no surprise that she found Hiccup in the armory, all starry-eyed as he studied the sleeve of a mail shirt, hefting it, turning it this way and that, prodding the riveted rings, and, knowing him, no surprise that he was more interested in armor than in weaponry; he didn't let it go, stroking it like a beloved thing, tracing his fingers over the links as she found herself admitting that she longed to have a coat of mailâ€”for safety's sake, of courseâ€”but the weight was too much for her, would leave her unable to draw her bow, and he nodded, eyes on the muted gleam of the shirt.

After that it was no surprise when she found that he'd made himself at home in the forge, the master smith himself sitting with the young man and a mass of iron rings between them, from which Hiccup took a ring that would have slipped easily over her thumb and wove it through a patch of metal cloth before securing the ring with a rivet; she knew the weight, the unyielding stubbornness of iron, and she wondered at the strength hidden in Hiccup's slim arms, in his crooked smiles.

(It was not much of a surprise to the maids when one of the princess' dresses went missing, though if Merida noticed it was gone she made no mention, and the lasses chalked its absence up to Her Highness' carelessness or her brothers' mischief.)

She had made enough visits to Berk that she thought nothing in the dragonhome could possibly surprise her, and she accepted the official gifts presented to herâ€”a cask of sweet wine and a fur-lined cloak, a necklace of ember-colored beads in a little carved chestâ€”with a grace her mum would be proud of and genuine gratitude; she could not confess to surprise even when a voice called to her from the smithy, where Hiccup babbled slightly nervously at her about metal mixtures that reduced weight while retaining their strength until he at last fell silent and stepped aside, revealing a shirt that glittered like starlight. At her gobsmacked, gaping silence he chuckled and asked if she'd like to try it on, so she raised her arms like a child for him to slip the mail over her head and then tug it gently into place, his hands lingering just above her hips, and she was not surprised that it fit, or that it was as light as the gown she wore; the surprise was that he'd made it for her, though when their eyes met it didn't seem that surprising after all.

* * *

><p>She'd known his name for years, had heard him called her intended, her promised, her future husband, but never before had that future seemed so dreadfully, inescapably imminent as the day the queen had announced that the princess and her father were to travel to Berk for the betrothal ceremony; at any other time there would

have been gales of shouting and torrents of tears to try to sway her mother's resolve, but the queen had been ill and was even now weak, face wan and shadowed and sad, so Merida swallowed what she could of her rage and did as she was bidâ€"though she was prepared to hate every moment of it, and every Viking she met.<p>

In the heaving below-decks of the ship she lay listening to her dad's snoring until, sure sleep would not come, she rifled through her bag for something to occupy her for a while; in their search her fingers rasped against rough parchment, and she drew an unfamiliar packet toward her, opening it to see her name on a somewhat stained and slightly battered letter, a handful of others like it still in the packet. She unfolded it hesitantly, the memory of Maudie offering her the letters and being summarily ignored creeping uncomfortably through her mind, and now by the swinging light of the lantern she read: the words of someone no more anxious to marry a stranger than she was, someone else whose shoulders bore an unwanted load of responsibility, someone who desired a life different from the one destined for him, someone who knew freedom in a way that she'd hardly thought to imagine; she read until dawn began to seep through the planks above, and throughout the day her thoughts returned to the letters returned to her pack, and the growing certainty that in Berk there was someone who would understand her. Maybe, she thought that night, rereading the letters and trying to picture their writer, listening for his voice in her head, she wouldn't have to hate _every_ Viking she met.

* * *

><p>Lipgloss stains<p>

He leaned away as the questing lips descended toward his collarbone and Merida sat back, one eyebrow raised and an incredulous tilt to her head; in explanation he lifted a hand from her hips, ran his thumb lightly over the berry-colored gloss on her lower lip, and said, "That doesn't wash out, you know."

After a moment of studying his faceâ€"a very quiet moment, a moment in which the temperature of the room seemed to drop a few degrees and he started mentally kicking himself for bringing it upâ€"she turned her attention to the waist she straddled, and then, with a thoroughness that he could feel, raked her eyes up his torso, navel to neck, appraising the faded Henley that covered it; the frustration he'd endured trying to rid collars of sticky smudges faded away with her so near, her weight warm on his thighs, the memory alone of the way she sucked at his pulse enough to take his breath away, and he opened his mouth to tell her he didn't care.

She beat him to it, though, drawling, "If you're so concerned with the state of your clothes, I've an idea about how to deal with that," and her mouth curved up in a measured, leonine smile as she reached for the hem of his shirt.

* * *

><p>Already there was a ballad about the princess' great beauty and grace, about her lily-white hands and cascading copper curls and cherry lips, and while he didn't disagree with the bard's basic thesis on Merida's loveliness, her appeal could not easily be related in a few generic, if soulfully sung, verses (which, upon hearing, her

brothers had swiftly mutilated, more in mockery of the songwriter than of their beloved sister; he knew which version she preferred, as she could barely conceal her disdain of the original). It was obvious that the song was based only on observation, and from a certain distance at that; though in it she was called bold and brave, more lines were devoted to praise of her sweet laugh and sparkling eyes and swan-like neck: a more perfect princess could not have existed. No mention was made of the rough calluses formed by bow string, sword hilt, and cliff face; there was not a word about her stormy temper and tendency toward rash decisions; her disdain for fine, courtly manners certainly did not make the cut; in short, everything that made her Merida and not a beautiful, lifeless doll was left out. It was not the tribute she deserved, but no balladeer could know the way it felt to ride with her, her curves pressed against him and her breath warm against his neck and his blood roaring through him; no troubadour should know the way a few carefully chosen—and, more importantly, sincerely meant—words could stain her cheeks crimson, have her biting her lip and looking up at him through her lashes until it took all of his concentration to keep his knees from buckling. No song would ever do her justice, though as her fingertips stroked his wrist and she raised her eyes to his, the offer and expectation there unmistakable, he hoped no one else would ever get close enough to sing the truth he already knew by heart.<p>

4. Chapter 4

These are a bit longer, but I didn't want to post them as their own chapters either here or in "Compendium."

* * *

><p>"Run."<p>

She shook her head stubbornly. Stubbornness was all she had now, when fear was sliding slick through her veins and his voice behind her was reedy, his breathing labored. Her fingers tightened on her bow.

"Please," he said, and she imagined—desperately prayed—that she could almost hear a familiar exasperation in his tone. There was no trace of it as he said, "You have to warn the others."

"No." How was her voice so steady when the tip of her nocked arrow trembled?

He cursed under his breath and then let out a too-long hiss. She fought the urge to turn; they could be found at any moment. She'd a strong desire to make their attackers into pincushions. "Eyes on the target," she reminded them both in a voice barely a whisper.

"You have to—"

"I'm not leaving you." She was cracking inside, coming to pieces. He coughed, the sound sudden and wet and somehow deafening in her ears, and she struggled to breathe through a throat shrunk too small.

"Merida." When she turned he was smiling. Ashen, blood-soaked, and smiling. Tears streaked down her cheeks; he wiped them away, and she

couldn't miss the way his fingers shook against her cheek. "Go, please. You don't need to protect me." He glanced down at the hand clutched over his midsection, and his smile turned rueful. "Not for long, anyway."

All she could do was shake her head, fresh tears spilling from her eyes. "I won't," she whispered. "I won't."

He blinked, his eyes opening again so slowly that she felt her heart freeze, and sighed. "Always so pig-headed," he muttered. "If you won't go, then sit. Make yourself comfortable."

So she settled beside him, close enough that he could coil her hair around his finger, close enough to feel his chest shudder with every breath. And she told him all the ways he'd made her happy, and all the things she loved about him, and the next time he said he name she kissed him and felt his smile beneath her lips.

She didn't think he'd blame her for what she did when their attackers finally arrived.

* * *

><p>A bit of Renaissance faire AU<p>

Toothless had climbed atop a stack of hay bales and lay just above Angus' eye level. The Clydesdale didn't seem to object to having visitors in the lean-to, where it was cooler and quieter and better-smelling than their tent was; so Hiccup pushed his hair back from his forehead and propped his elbows on the rail and relaxed for a moment.

That is, until a greeting brought him out of his slouch. "Good day, um, lady," he returned awkwardly. "Or should it be princess?"

She waved all titles away. "Merida is fine, really. Though, for the record, my dad's King Fergus of DunBroch, and Mum's Her Majesty Elinor, Queen of Everything." Her eyes rolled as only a teenage daughter's can. "But you're lucky. Since you're a Viking, no one expects you to be polite." Her tone was wistful, and maybe a little envious. He watched as she checked the water level in the trough and then gave Angus a scratch.

"Care to defect?" he offered.

She snorted. "That doesn't sound like your style. I thought you were more into enlarging your ranks through raiding. Y'know, carrying off gold and sheep and foreign women." Over her shoulder she looked him up and down, smiling slyly.

"We're more civilized than you give us credit for. That is," he added, thinking of last night's belching contest, "historically speaking."

She joined him at the rail and leaned against it as he'd been doing before her arrival. A quiver bumped at her hip, the arrows in it tied together loosely. He, too, bent at the waist and rested his weight on his crossed arms. From here they could see people on their way to and from the bathrooms, though guests weren't likely to see them. As he watched a pigtailed girl about their age passed by; she was liberally

sprinkled with glitter, wearing a fluttery, gauzy dress, and had a pair of children's costume wings attached to her back. Beside him Merida sighed.

He stole a glance at her, then looked back at the girl and said, "I don't recall hearing anything about fairies when we studied the Renaissance in school."

"You wouldn't. You lot have elves up there, not fairies. Entirely different species," she explained, as if he really ought to know better. Her fingers twitched around her arrows. "Think I could shoot the wings off from here?"

He'd seen her archery demonstration; he had no doubt. "Could you? Sure. Should you?" He paused, then wagged a hand side to side. "Ehâ€|"

That earned him a smirk. His own lips twitched in accord, and they lapsed again into silence, listening to the faire: vendors hawking their goods, cheers and laughter from a crowd, children shrieking in glee, the thumping rhythm of a drum accompanying someone's singing.

Then, above it all, he heard his name, once at a normal shout and then in a bellow of "_HICCUP!_" Had that much time passed? "Duty calls," he said, ducking under the rail.

Her eyes were wide, her rosy lips parted in amazement. "Duty?" she echoed. "Sounds more like a bear."

He shrugged. "It's the same thing, isn't it?"

When their eyes met he felt a jolt, hot and low and marrow-deep; but he also saw that she understood, and that warmed him in a completely different way. He smiled, slowly, and then pursed his lips and whistled. Merida's quizzical expression at the noise turned to startlement as Toothless bounded from his perch onto Angus' back, making the horse shy, and then to the dirt at Merida's feet. The two exchanged a look before Toothless joined his grinning master.

She looked at him, speculative. "Until we meet again, milady," Hiccup said with a bow; then he turned and jogged off, Toothless at his side and her eyes on him.

* * *

><p>Everywhere they walked villagers hailed him with fond greetings that he answered in kind. More than a few younger girls giggled as they called, eyes raking sharply over her and lingering rather warmly on him. A mad impulse urged her to step closer to him, to show those girls that, for the moment at least, she had what they wanted, and she nearly obeyed. But from further away it was easier to admire the line of his jaw and the smattering of freckles across his cheeks, his quick grins and quicker wit, his glance gentle when it lit on her.<p>

Though Stoick did his best to appear interested in the queen's garden, so unlike anything on Berk, his son was having a harder time; no flowers could hold his attention while the princess walked alongside him. Next to her he felt gangly and graceless, envious of

her loose-limbed ease and despairing of the way she seemed unaffected by his presence, contrary to her effect on him. Or so he thought, until a wild swing of her arm caused their hands to brush each other. As a shock coursed through his body she stumbled, face scarlet, and he let hope rise.

Her dad's singing cut him off midsentence, and he looked so boyishly lost and confused at the interruption that she laughed quietly. His expression changed as he watched her chuckle, something just short of a smile on his lips. Then, with a squeak and a scrape unnoticed above the din, he pushed his chair closer to hers and picked up where he'd left off; his voice was low enough that she had to lean in to hear, though she found herself distracted by the mesmerizing progress of his fingertip tracing whorls on the tabletop, movement and murmur making her shiver.

Gobber had demanded they share a drink, but he couldn't seem to keep his attention on anything the smith said; it kept wandering away across the hall, to where her head was thrown back in a laugh, curls dancing, cheeks rosy with firelight and drink. He was lost in the sight until she looked straight at him and he felt it like a blow to his gut, knocking the wind from him. Her face dropped to the mug cupped in her hands; then her eyes flicked up, meeting his again, and she bit her lower lip against a shy smile.

His fingers, light against the soft skin of the underside of her wrist, made her pulse fly. She couldn't bear the waiting anymore, the unanswered expectation, and nearly wrested her arm free and snapped at him; but the look on his face, the admiration and desperation and determination there, stopped her short. A gentle tug brought her closer, finally close enough to feel the steady, dizzying warmth of him. Her breath caught in her throat, and eyes that had widened now shut slowly, and she sighed against his lips, and twisted her hand in his to twine their fingers together.

End
file.